

The following are basic definitions of terms used in this and future Issues & Answers.

Basic Definitions

The **American Community Survey (ACS)** is the planned replacement for the 2010 census long form, and is a new way of collecting detailed information about the characteristics of population and housing. The ACS is planned to start in 2003 with an annual sample of approximately 3 million addresses spread across all counties and American Indian Reservations, pending funding from Congress.

Three testing programs using the ACS questionnaires and procedures permit comparison of ACS and Census 2000 data, so data users can understand the implications of changing to a new way of collecting this important information. These programs are:

The ACS Demonstration Phase began with four sites (Rockland County, New York; Multnomah County, OR; Brevard County, FL; and Fulton County, PA) in 1996 and grew to nine sites in 1998. Data were collected from 15 percent of the households in Brevard, Rockland, and Multnomah Counties, and from 30 percent of the households in Fulton County during 1996. During 1997, four more sites were added: Douglas County, NE; Otero County, NM; Franklin County, OH; Fort Bend and Harris Counties, TX. The sample size for Douglas County was 15 percent, Fulton County was 9 percent, and the remaining counties were 3 percent. In 1998, Broward County, FL; and Richland and Kershaw Counties, SC were added. The South Carolina site was sampled at a 5 percent rate. In Broward County, the cities of Ft. Lauderdale and Hollywood were sampled at 2.5 percent, the cities of Coral Springs and Pembroke Pines at 3 percent, and the balance of the county at 0.7 percent. The South Carolina site was only included in 1998, and activity ceased in Brevard County, FL after February 1998.

The ACS Comparison Sites (1999-2001) These are 36 counties, grouped into 31 "sites;" for example, Harris and Fort Bend counties are the Houston site. Most of the sites have a 5 percent annual sample, so that the three-year cumulations for 1999-2001 approximate a full-sized ACS sample spread across the entire county. Some of the larger sites have a 3 percent annual sample, and Houston has 1 percent sample. The sites were chosen to represent situations where the greatest differences between the ACS and the census can be expected, so that the differences for small areas such as census tracts can be studied and understood.

The Census 2000 Supplementary Survey (C2SS) This was an operational feasibility test conducted in 2000 using the ACS questionnaire in 1,203 counties with about a 0.6 percent annual sample in most states. It allows comparison of the results of the ACS questionnaire and procedures with the census at the state and national level. This gives a good indication of measurement differences, but the confidence intervals from the C2SS will be much larger than for the future ACS, especially because not all counties are included in the C2SS. (The C2SS sample is about *one-twentieth* of the 5-year cumulated ACS sample that we propose as the replacement for the long form for estimates of small groups.)

The C2SS data were interesting to look at in the summer and fall of 2001, when Census 2000 long form data were not yet available. Once the long form data are released, they will be the definitive description of detailed population characteristics. The Census 2000 long form design is the accepted, agreed-upon way to measure the characteristics of the population in 2000. Because of its much larger sample size of 19 million addresses, these 2000 data will continue to provide the official detailed picture of the population until the ACS cumulates a sufficient sample size later in the decade.

Comparing the C2SS to the Supplementary Surveys in 2001 and 2002 will be useful for measuring year-to-year changes for states and large sub-state areas. As a rule of thumb, we expect that the sample will usefully measure changes only for areas of 1 million population or more; below that only very large changes could be detected. For states below 1 million population, the C2SS has a higher sampling rate so that year-to-year changes can be measured.

Other Surveys. The Census Bureau will continue to conduct specialized household surveys producing national estimates for topics such as employment and unemployment; crime victimization; income, poverty, and program participation; and detailed changes in housing conditions. These surveys ask focused batteries of questions that could not be administered as part of a general-purpose mail survey like the ACS or the census long form. As in the past, these surveys are regarded as giving definitive measurements of their specific subject matter at the national level, but only the census long form (or ACS) has sufficient sample to provide precise state and sub-state estimates. These survey programs are supplemented by two statistical modeling programs: the Bureau of Labor Statistics' program of Local Area Unemployment Statistics and the Census Bureau's Small-Area Income and Poverty Estimates program, which give sub-state estimates for only those specific characteristics.